

# My Wake



By AW1(AW) Shawn A. Mercer

I'm here to tell you even a flyer of 12 years can make dumb mistakes. We've all done it; we've read the articles that make you cringe and make you think to yourself, "What a knucklehead that guy is!" We always take something away from our reading that may prevent us from killing ourselves, killing someone else, damaging an aircraft, or just looking stupid.

We were on our way home from an extended work-up period. It was my first time to sea in the LAMPS Mk-III helo, and, in many ways, I still was green to the helicopter community. Shipboard landings were the primary focus during the days immediately before our flyoff. It was the beginning of the month, and we wanted to maintain our currency as long as possible. We also wanted to make sure everyone received flight-deck pay for another month.

It seemed like we bounced endlessly on the back of our cruiser: up, down, up, down, over and over. Our after-takeoff and before-landing checks were modified because of multiple RA

and free-deck landings. The only modification that applied to me was leaving the RAST probe in the down position during the evolutions. We just were doing laps in the pattern and bouncing. No harm done. Right?

The day finally came to fly off and head for "home sweet home." Time to go back to family and friends and share the experiences of shipboard life: how it feels to walk on walls and how to keep the fine shipboard chow from revisiting you unexpectedly. Many important things required our attention.

The takeoff from the boat was uneventful. I reported the crewman's after-takeoff checks complete and stared anxiously at the radarscope until I saw the familiar outline that defined home. The flight went well, aside from the junior pilot's dilemma as to which lucky lady got the first call when he was back in town. In fact, the entire flight back was filled with chatter regarding how we planned to fill our days before the long cruise. Unfortunately, the detachment maintenance officer felt he needed to inflict his ideas on us for prioritizing preparations for our pre-deployment readiness inspection. It's funny what becomes important to some, but we endured.

With our home field in sight and landing checks complete, tower cleared us to land on the parallel taxiway for the wash rack. The pilot set down the aircraft—softly—because of the weight we carried. Then it happened—there was a thump!

The maintenance chief and I glanced at each other, looking surprised, and simultaneously exclaimed, "What was that?" I immediately checked my equipment, looked up at the RAST panel, and discovered I was a knucklehead. I hadn't raised the RAST probe during my after-takeoff checklist. An hour later, I finally raised the probe without incident.

# e-Up Thump

After shutdown, we inspected the aircraft and found no damage. That day, I joined the ranks of knuckleheads—some not as lucky as me. Those who are familiar with Seahawks know things could have been a lot worse. What if we had done a run-on landing? I get goose bumps just thinking about that very real scenario.

Checklists, checklists, checklists—make sure you comprehend each item's query and make sure you have complied with it. Sometimes we get so comfortable we gloss over the familiar words, and, every now and then, one of us gets bitten. Be meticulous. 🦅

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